

John Douglas's Guide to the Police Officer Exams (Kaplan Test Prep)

By John Douglas

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Fully revised and updated guide by nationally known law enforcement figure John Douglas.

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John Douglas's Guide to the Police Officer Exams features:

- Tips for managing the application process
- Review and strategies for the written test
- Insights and guidance from veteran officers on the selection process
- Full-length diagnostic test
- Math review section
- Updated information about careers in the police force
- Revised full-length practice tests

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Editorial Review

About the Author
John Douglas, a highly regarded figure in the field of law enforcement, founded and ran the FBI's Investigative Support Unit for 15 years before serving an additional ten years as an FBI field agent and recruiter. He is the author of several books about famous FBI cases and was the inspiration for the character of Jack Crawford in *Silence of the Lambs* and *Red Dragon*. Douglas lives in New York City.

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Chapter One - Introduction

Let me ask you a question: Why do you want to be a cop? I'm assuming you know it's a tough job -- extended periods of tedium interrupted by moments of butt-puckering panic. High rates of divorce, alcoholism, hypertension, and every other stress indicator you can think of. The pay and benefits can be pretty good, but they can also be pretty lousy. (Take a look at the list of best-paying, and worst-paying, police departments on the next page.)

So why do you want to be a cop? The best reason, of course, is that you have a kind of vocation for it. You want a career that lets you do something meaningful, something more important than pushing papers or answering e-mail. And that's good. When everybody's running away from the danger, someone's got to run toward it.

PREPARATION TIP NO. 1: PRACTICE SAYING,"YES, SIR!"

You'll be saying it a lot as soon as you get into the Academy. Law enforcement agencies are organized like the military, with strict hierarchies of rank and areas of responsibility. Within each rank, there are usually two or more levels, such as Detective I, II, and III. Higher levels correspond with higher pay and increased responsibility, often supervising those at the levels just below.

The description that follows is a fairly general one; the details for the department you're interested in could vary. But one thing all police departments have in common is bureaucracy, and lots of it.

Police Officer

These are the foot soldiers -- the largest and most visible part of any department. Most often, a police recruit fresh from the academy is assigned to a specific patrol under the supervision of a training officer. After a probationary period, he or she then advances to the next level, and can go on to specialized patrols, such as the K-9 division, motorcycle patrol, or narcotics.

Right from the beginning, police officers handle the day-to-day work of law enforcement: responding to the scene of a crime or an accident; interviewing suspects and witnesses; writing crime reports; responding to radio calls; coordinating vehicular traffic; booking suspects and evidence and transporting them to the appropriate Police Department facility; responding to citizens' and visitors' questions; and attending and coordinating neighborhood watch meetings.

A Police Officer assigned to a specialized division handles all these duties, plus whatever's required by the division's mission. For instance, an officer assigned to juvenile Narcotics Division might conduct undercover

narcotics investigations or patrol the school area to monitor criminal activity and to maintain contact with the school officials. Desk officers take care of administrative and coordination duties at station houses and department headquarters.

As an officer gains experience, he or she becomes eligible for more specialized duties and assignments, such as recruiting, teaching at the academy, or providing security for the chief or the mayor.

Years ago, a good patrol officer could stay on patrol his entire career. These days, officers often feel pressure to move up or move out. I think this is unfortunate, because it means that rookie officers are working patrols with officers who really don't have that much more experience. There's a kind of competence and confidence that comes only with experience; it's a shame that experience often isn't available to the cops who are the most visible, who deal with the public just about every working minute.

Police Detective

These are the guys (and gals) you see in the TV cop shows. While uniformed officers handle the initial, ground-level work on a case, the detectives are responsible for follow-through -- actually solving the crime. Their duties include conducting preliminary and follow-up investigations; preparing the required investigative reports; identifying and apprehending the suspect; preparing the case for a successful prosecution; and testifying in court. Depending on their specific assignments, detectives also might conduct narcotics investigations; establish and maintain contacts with informants; and investigate gang-related crimes. Often, detectives develop an area of expertise, such as electronic surveillance, and will be asked to use that expertise to assist in cases other than those they're assigned to. As with officers, detectives who move up within the detective rank generally end up supervising other detectives.

Police Sergeant

Sergeants supervise geographic patrol divisions, specialized divisions and administrative units of these divisions. On patrol, the Sergeant may be a Watch Commander or Assistant Watch Commander. This means the sergeant handles administrative duties such as preparing daily car plan assignments; preparing and presenting roll call training; supervising the desk and patrol officers; handling radio calls and dispatching personnel; keeping the supervisors informed of important developments or issues; and training and supervising probationary officers.

Police Lieutenant

Just as a sergeant is in charge of a patrol, a lieutenant oversees an area made up of several patrols, supervising the sergeants, police officers and detectives who carry out the day-to-day law enforcement. The lieutenant acts as an assistant to a captain, and is the commander in the captain's absence; his or her job is to take care of the details, so the captain can concentrate on the big picture. This means deploying officers to meet crime trends or emergencies; responding to scenes of serious crimes such as officer-involved shootings, homicide, major robbery and theft; keeping an eye on follow-up investigations to make sure they're complete and accurate; and -- this is often the hardest part -- deciding what the captain needs to be told, and when. In keeping with the rank's operational focus, the lieutenant often is the chief administrative officer in an area: reviewing and responding to correspondence; overseeing training; and attending community functions as a department representative.

Police Captain

The captain is the lieutenant's boss, the person in charge of overall, long-term operations for an area or a division. A captain will keep an eye on his or her area to ensure compliance with department policies; inspect

the area's personnel, facilities, and tactics for safety or training needs; oversee budgeting and planning; and maintain contact with other civic departments, community groups, and private citizens.

Past the rank of captain, things get a little more complicated. Small departments may only have a rank or two between captain and chief; larger ones may include more layers. Also, the way a police chief or commissioner is selected varies from department to department. In some, selecting the chief is handled pretty much as another civil service appointment; in others, the chief is picked by the mayor or city council or some other governmental body. Again depending on the agency, the chief or commissioner may bring in his or her own assistants, or may be bound to keep the personnel already in place.

Police Commander or Supervisor

In large agencies, the police department will be broken down into four or five bureaus or departments, according to geography or function or both. These bureaus are overseen by deputy chiefs or assistant commissioners; the day-today operations of the bureaus are handled by commanders, or supervisors. (The names for these ranks change from department to department.) For instance, in Los Angeles, a deputy chief is in charge of the Operations-Headquarters Bureau; he or she will be assisted by a fleet of Police Commanders, each of whom runs a department within the bureau: Community Affairs, Uniformed Services, Detective Services, Juvenile Services, Criminal Intelligence, Personnel, Training, Internal Affairs, Administrative, and Transit Groups. Each of these Groups are subdivided into more specialized divisions such as Narcotics, Organized Crime and Vice, Antiterrorist, Burglary/Auto Theft, Air Support, Crime Suppression, Labor Relations, and Robbery/Homicide; each of these divisions are overseen by a police captain.

In general terms, the commander-deputy chief relationship is like the lieutenant-captain relationship; the former handles the details, while the latter does the long-term thinking and planning.

Police Deputy Chief or Deputy Commissioner

The deputy chief or deputy commissioner reports directly to the chief or commissioner and oversees a departmental bureau. Large agencies will have several deputy chiefs or commissioners. These men and women are the eyes and ears of the commissioner; their job is to keep on top of the department and make sure the chief's mission is communicated and enacted through the agency.

Chief of Police, or Police Commissioner

This is the big cheese, the highest-ranking officer in a police department. If the uniformed cops are the most visible as a group, the chief is the most visible individual. The chief gets to take the heat when things go wrong (as with a controversial police shooting) and take the credit when things go right (as when the crime rate drops). While his deputies oversee current operations, the chief or commissioner plans for the department's needs in the future. The chief has the large-scale jobs: developing and maintaining good relationships with the mayor, the governor, the police commission, or whatever other governmental body oversees the department; anticipating social and economic changes that could affect local law enforcement; and building and strengthening community-police relations. The job pays well, but talk about stress!

BIG CITY OR SMALL TOWN?

When you imagine yourself as a cop, do you see Sipowicz, or Andy Griffith? (Actually, if the first thing you see is a TV cop, you should cancel your cable service and get out more.) What I'm asking you here is, where do you want to work? That initial decision will have a big effect on your career as a law enforcement officer.

In a small department, you'll. handle everything, and you'll get to know the people you deal with really well. The pay tends to be lower, but so does the cost of living. On the other hand, police departments in small towns, or even in mediumsized cities, don't offer the range of specialized departments a larger force can. just as a comparison, let's take a look at two police departments in two different towns: Gadsen, AL, and Los Angeles, CA.

Gadsden Police Department

Gadsden's 117 full-time police officers protect a population of 44,000 residents; they handled 52,913 calls in 1998. Their specialized departments include K-9 (one officer), Bicycle Patrol (four officers), and Vice and Narcotics (three officers, one sergeant, and one lieutenant). One of the largest drug seizures in 1998 included $4,300 cash, 110 grams of crack cocaine, 6.8 grams of powder cocaine, and 28 grams of marijuana,

Los Angeles Police Department

The LAPD patrols 467 square miles, with a population of 3.4 million residents. The department employs over 12,500 sworn and civilian employees, organized into eight bureaus and over 50 divisions, groups, units or sections. Specialized divisions include Organized Crime and Vice, Narcotics, Antiterrorist, Robbery/Homicide, Burglary/Auto Theft, Bomb Squad, Scientific Support, and Air Support. Total drug seizures in 1998 were 144 grams of heroin; 5,673 grams of cocaine; 241 grams of PCP; 2,598 grams of methamphetamines.

Don't misunderstand me -- I'm not making any sort of comparison between these two departments as far as the value of their work. The officers in Gadsden do important work, and so do the folks in the LAPD. But if your fondest dream is to fly a police helicopter, Gadsden is not the place for you.

Think about what you want, what your skills are. Now do some research on the department, or departments, you're interested in. Is it a good match? Or should you revise your plans?

PREPARE YOURSELF

You've already taken a big step toward becoming a cop: You've been proactive, seeking out assistance to make yourself a better candidate. Keep that attitude, and you'll do fine.

The best thing you can do to prepare yourself is to inform yourself. Talk to cops. Read about cops. Get on the Internet and research the agencies that interest you.(Of course, the fact that I have a page on the site doesn't make me biased.) This is just one of literally hundreds of Web sites that will let you walk in the shoes of a cop, before you even get into the Academy.

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